

A FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY FOR AUSTRALIA

IWDA POSITION PAPER ON FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY

Gender is a crucial factor in shaping the economies, governance and stability of nations around the world.¹ Despite this, Australia's foreign policy has traditionally been based on the assumption that our interest in a peaceful and prosperous region can be met without consideration of the gendered implications of trade, defence, diplomacy and international cooperation. This hides issues of importance to Australia's bilateral and regional relationships, and represents a missed opportunity to work towards a more equal world.

Australia has been a world leader in integrating a strong focus on gender equality within our international development cooperation program, but we are being left behind as other nations forge ahead and adopt feminist approaches to foreign policy and international development cooperation. Adopting a feminist foreign policy would place Australia at the forefront of efforts to bring about gender equality globally and act as an important signal to our allies and neighbours.

IWDA AND FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY

As a feminist organisation, IWDA is deeply committed to the political process of transforming gender inequality. IWDA has been working to develop an understanding of what feminist foreign policy means for Australia through research, consultations with women's rights activists from around the world, and strategic collaborations. For example, in 2019 IWDA co-hosted a workshop of 40 feminist activists from 19 countries to debate the principles and accountability mechanisms that would be required for feminist foreign policy. This was a

critical moment to understand the impact of feminist foreign policies on women in the global south, and identify the principles and accountability mechanisms they considered critical to feminist foreign policy.²

This paper draws on IWDA's work to date, outlining the basis of a feminist foreign policy for Australia which is rights based and intersectional, seeks to transform unequal power relations that lead to gender inequality, and which is comprehensive and accountable.

PROMOTE WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP & PARTICIPATION

By adopting a feminist foreign policy which prioritises diverse women's leadership, Australia can demonstrate its own global leadership.

STRENGTHEN WOMEN'S SAFETY & SECURITY

Peace and security are gendered. Adopting a feminist foreign policy will strengthen safety and security for all.

ACCELERATE WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Feminist foreign policy can help unlock women's potential to contribute to and benefit from trade and economic activity.

ADVANCE SYSTEMIC CHANGES TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY

A feminist foreign policy will ensure a holistic approach across all areas of foreign policy, and strengthen systemic change towards gender equality.

WHAT IS FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY

There has been increased focus in recent years on the concept of a feminist foreign policy, after Sweden launched its feminist foreign policy in 2014.³ Sweden's move was followed by Canada's adoption of a Feminist International Assistance Policy in 2017 (which will be expanded into a feminist foreign policy white paper in 2020) and Luxembourg's adoption of a feminist foreign policy in 2019.⁴ France similarly began with a feminist international development program and expanded it to a feminist foreign policy, and its co-host of the 2020 Generation Equality Forums, Mexico, has also launched a feminist foreign policy.⁵

It is critical to recognise that many of these developments were enabled by years of advocacy from feminist and women's groups, such as the establishment of the W20 and W7 mechanisms, which paved the way for the France's focus on gender equality in its host year of the G7 in 2019 and its subsequent adoption of a feminist foreign policy. Feminist researchers and activists continue to evolve the concept of feminist foreign policy, and hold governments to account for their commitments. In doing so, feminist organisations have worked to define feminist foreign policy, develop principles and criteria, and propose measurable targets.⁶

Common among various definitions of feminist foreign policy, and to the policy commitments that have already been made by governments around the world, is a commitment to embedding gender equality as a central purpose and key goal, ensuring analysis of the gendered impacts of all aspects of foreign policy.⁷

However, gender equality as a purpose and goal is not sufficient for a policy to be considered feminist. To reach that distinction it must involve an interrogation of the differentiated impacts of policy upon people based on their gender, as well as the harmful gender norms and power dynamics that have given rise to gender inequality. It must be rights based and intersectional, engage with and seek to transform unequal power relations that lead to gender inequality, and be comprehensive and accountable.⁸

Policy is only ever as good as its implementation. Strong accountability mechanisms are needed to ensure that commitments to feminist foreign policy lead to commensurate action. As identified by IWDA and others, genuine implementation must include:

- **Transparent, public and inclusive planning and progress reporting**, to enable input of civil society and affected groups into the development of policy, and scrutiny of implementation.
- Appropriate levels of **human, financial, and legal resourcing**, including incentives for foreign policy actors at all levels to further the aims of feminist foreign policy, and financial resources to back it up.⁹
- **Disaggregated data** to ensure that policy and program interventions are targeted and efficient, geared towards meeting areas of greatest need and tracking progress toward outcomes. This data must be multidimensional and measured below the household level to ensure that the lived experience of women is captured.
- All this must be underpinned by feminist leadership. **Feminist leadership** requires efforts to ensure gender parity in all positions of leadership and decision making – as well as other forms of diversity – but it goes further to require that all leaders, regardless of their gender, race or ability, work to transform the unequal power relations that lead to all forms of inequality, including gender inequality.¹⁰

The following sections of this report will assess Australia's foreign policy against a feminist approach, and make recommendations for how Australia could move towards a feminist approach across all areas of foreign policy including international development cooperation.

AUSTRALIA'S APPROACH TO FOREIGN POLICY

Australia's 2017 *Foreign Policy White Paper* states that "[a]ll government policies, including our foreign policy, must give expression to, and be formed on the basis of, the values of our community" and names gender equality amongst these values.¹¹ Additionally, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT) *Gender equality and women's empowerment strategy* argues that gender equality "is a global issue, relevant to Australia and the economic, social, welfare and foreign policies of all countries", and outlines priorities for the advancement of gender equality across Australia's foreign policy, trade and international development cooperation work.¹² At a global level, Australia has signed up to the Sustainable Development Goals, which include a dedicated goal on gender equality as well as a mainstreamed approach to gender across all 17 SDGs.

Despite these laudable commitments, gaps persist in terms of comprehensive integration of gender equality aims across all areas of Australia's international engagement. Australia's foreign policy has been based on the assumption that our foreign policy aims are gender neutral, and can be met without consideration of the gendered implications of defence, trade, diplomacy and international engagement. This failure to consider gender as a routine part of foreign policy hides issues of importance to Australia's bilateral and regional relationships, and hinders progress towards the commitments made in the White Paper and DFAT's Gender Equality Strategy. In line with commitments already made by Sweden, Canada, France and Mexico, Australia should adopt a feminist foreign policy which places gender equality as the goal of foreign policy, and commits to intersectional gender analysis across all aspects of foreign policy and international development cooperation. The following section outlines what a feminist foreign policy would entail across Australia's defence, trade, and diplomatic and multilateral engagement.

1

AN EXPANDED VISION OF PEACE AND HUMAN SECURITY

The Boe Declaration on Regional Security, which Australia signed alongside other Pacific Island Forum States in 2018, takes an expanded concept of security to encompass "human security, including humanitarian assistance, to protect the rights, health and prosperity of Pacific people" and identifies climate change as "the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific."¹³

Achieving human security and gender equality is critical to achieving and sustaining peace. States with higher levels of gender equality also tend to have a lower likelihood of interstate or intrastate violence, lower levels of perceived or actual corruption and a higher trust in their government.¹⁴ Poor performance on gender equality has been identified by the Asian Development Bank as a key commonality amongst the 9 of 14 Pacific nations it classifies as fragile, and identifies this as a potential threat to regional stability.¹⁵ Participation and leadership of diverse women and LGBTIQ groups in disaster risk reduction, climate change mitigation and adaptation is critical to ensuring human security in the face of climate change.¹⁶

Australia currently spends \$9 on Defence for every \$1 allocated to international development cooperation

Gender inequality is a key commonality amongst the 9 Pacific countries classified as fragile and vulnerable to conflict

Prioritising the women, peace and security agenda can help Australia move towards a feminist foreign policy

Working towards an expanded notion of human security requires a rebalancing of investment, including to international development cooperation. It will require Australia to prioritise implementation of the women, peace and security agenda as part of a broader conception of peace and security that puts gender equality and human security at the centre of our efforts.

2

ENSURING TRADE POLICY CONTRIBUTES TO GENDER EQUALITY

DFAT's Gender Equality Strategy identifies that "women's economic empowerment is a driver of economic growth and prosperity" and commits to "ensure our trade work advances its gender equality objectives."¹⁷ However greater emphasis on gender analysis is needed to underpin all trade negotiations and policy development, in order to ensure that Australia's trade policy progresses gender equality.

Research has found that trade liberalisation has often exacerbated existing gender inequalities and worsened women's economic and social status.¹⁸ For example, there is evidence that trade liberalisation can lead to increases in the gender wage gap. As export-oriented industries benefit from trade and become more attractive, they become more competitive and women who previously worked in these industries are pushed out into lower waged work.¹⁹

The creation of export processing zones have actively reduced labour protections for employees, typically in the women-dominated garment sector.²⁰ Women-led small, micro and medium enterprises also stand to lose from trade liberalisation, as they may be unable to compete with cheap imported goods.²¹ Finally, flow on effects such as decreased government revenue from tariffs and taxes undermining governments' ability to provide social protection and services, which in turn can lead to an increase in women's unpaid care burden, must also be considered.²²

Understanding the gendered implications of trade policy and ensuring mitigating policies are in place is essential to ensure more beneficial outcomes for all.

Trade liberalisation can increase the gender pay gap, as women are forced out of more attractive industries into lower paid work

Women-led small, micro and medium enterprises often struggle to compete with cheap imported goods

Incorporating gender issues into trade policy and negotiations can help ensure that free trade benefits women

3

AUSTRALIA'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTERNATIONAL RULES BASED ORDER

Australia's bilateral and multilateral relationships represent critical fora to defend space for civil society and the international rules based order, which are both critical to a peaceful and flourishing region. The annual CIVICUS State of Civil Society Report 2019 found that 6.15 billion

Over 6 billion people are now living in countries where space for civil society is obstructed, repressed or entirely closed

people are now living in countries where space for civil society is obstructed, repressed or entirely closed.²³

The report also raises concerns about the international rules based order and found that “[n]ational sovereignty ... is being reasserted and used as an excuse to override international agreements” while the institutions which uphold these agreements are being undermined through both rhetoric and a lack of funding,²⁴ and conservative and religious actors are taking advantage of this by using multilateral processes to undermine past agreements on women’s human rights (particularly for transwomen and all LGBTIQ people) and stymie progress towards gender equality.²⁵

Australia has long championed the rules based order through its multilateral engagement. Australia’s positions on the Human Rights Council and the Commission on the Status of Women, and our many diplomatic relationships around the world, represent key opportunities for Australia to take a leading role in upholding the role of multilateral institutions and advancing gender equality.

Increasing authoritarianism globally is contributing to a push back on women’s rights

Australia can counter the backlash to women’s rights by supporting civil society and the rules based order

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendation 1: Adopt a feminist foreign policy covering trade, diplomacy, defence, security and development cooperation, and undertake gendered analysis to ensure actions in these areas support gender equality.

Recommendation 2: Prioritise implementation of the women, peace and security agenda, with consideration to the links between gender inequality, climate change and regional stability.

Recommendation 3: Support a vibrant civil society and the international rules based order through direct funding for CSOs, advocacy on space for civil society in bilateral and multilateral forums, and consultation and engagement at all levels.

A FEMINIST APPROACH TO INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

In today's interconnected world, the interests of all nations are inextricably linked. Trade, movement of people and capital, climate change, and innovations in technology and communications have created unprecedented levels of interconnectedness and interdependence amongst nations.²⁶ While strides have been made in reducing poverty, inequality between and within nations has grown.²⁷ No country in the world has fully achieved gender equality, and nearly 40 percent of women and girls live in countries failing on global gender equality targets.²⁸ Across the world, women face barriers to leadership, widespread gender-based violence, and limited opportunities for economic participation.

Australia's development cooperation program includes strong policies on gender equality. However political commitment to international development cooperation as a whole has waned, with successive budget cuts bringing Australia's Official Development Assistance (ODA) to its lowest level in history. In line with a feminist foreign policy approach, Australia must recognise the critical role of ODA in contributing to a peaceful and flourishing region, and prioritise gender equality as a core part of our international development cooperation program.

1

CONTRIBUTING TO A PEACEFUL AND FLOURISHING REGION

International development cooperation is a critical pillar of foreign policy, and an important tool to advance gender equality. DFAT's Gender Equality Strategy provides a strong starting point for efforts to pursue gender equality through development cooperation, which could be further strengthened by elevating gender equality to be part of the core purpose of Australia's international development efforts. The purpose of the program should also emphasise the role of ODA in contributing to peace and stability, and in creating the conditions for all people to flourish across all dimensions of human development. This must be supported by a commitment for Australia to reach the internationally agreed standard of 0.7% of gross national income to ODA by 2030.

This focus on human development can ensure that Australia's international development addresses the multifaceted needs of individuals caught in cycles of poverty and inequality. This includes basing our policies on poverty measurements that go beyond the household level, such as the Individual Deprivation Measure, which can identify the circumstances of individuals and the intersecting forms of marginalisation they experience. This can help Australia to better target funding and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of development cooperation efforts. To be successful, this focus on improving the lives of individuals must be complemented by interventions that address social norms and attitudes at the family, community and societal level.²⁹

The purpose of Australia's development cooperation should be to contribute to a flourishing and peaceful region for all by addressing poverty and inequality, advancing gender equality, and strengthening human security

The Individual Deprivation Measure is a new, multidimensional, individual and scalar measure of poverty which can help governments better target policy

2

ADDRESSING GENDER NORMS

To support progress towards the goal of gender equality, Australia's international development cooperation must ensure gender analysis across all policies and investments, as well as targeted investments in women's rights and gender equality initiatives – otherwise known as the twin track approach, and recognised in DFAT's existing gender equality strategy.³⁰

Applying this principle as part of a feminist approach would require us to prioritise investment in long term, targeted interventions designed to address the social norms that underpin gender inequality. In practice, this means strengthening existing investments in women's leadership and participation at all levels, and towards ending violence against women. A feminist approach would prioritise upholding sexual and reproductive health and rights, including the access to contraception, safe abortion and comprehensive sexuality education for all. It also requires new, long term gender equality investments designed in partnership with women's rights organisations. Taking a similar twin track approach to other areas of social inclusion, such as inclusion of people with disabilities and people of diverse sexual orientation and gender identities, would lay a strong foundation for intersectional practice.

These efforts must be underpinned by analysis of the social norms that constrain women, girls and people of all gender identities from enjoying their human rights. Gender analysis can highlight issues that were previously invisible. For example, women perform a greater share of unpaid caring work within the household – estimated globally to be worth at least 13 percent of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP).³¹ When IWDA's partner organisation Voice for Change surveyed men and women in the Jiwaka Province of Papua New Guinea, respondents likened women's burden of unpaid care to slavery.³² This is both a violation of women's human rights that needs to be addressed, as well as a limitation on the effectiveness on other development initiatives such as women's economic empowerment programs.

A feminist approach would also require greater integration across priorities within the gender equality space, considering how advances in one area affect progress in another and ensuring a "do no harm approach". For example, IWDA and ANU research has highlighted the significant risk of increased violence that women can face when participating in women's economic empowerment programs.³³ The threat of violence is further compounded for women with disabilities.³⁴ A holistic, do no harm approach – underpinned by intersectional gender analysis – is needed to ensure that programs are having sustainable, positive impact on women's lives.

Understanding social norms is critical to designing good gender equality policy and programs

The unpaid care work performed by women is estimated to be worth 13% of global GDP

IWDA and ANU research has highlighted that women face an increased risk of violence when participating in economic empowerment programs

3

STRENGTHENING AUSTRALIA'S INVESTMENTS AND PERFORMANCE ON GENDER EQUALITY

The 2014 performance framework for the international development program, Making Performance Count, set a target that “80% of investments effectively address gender issues in their implementation.” While the 80% target has yet to be achieved, there is good evidence that it has been effective in supporting DFAT to increase its capacity to conduct gender analysis, and has ensured that new investments are designed with gender considerations in mind. Maintaining the target with a commitment to increase to 85% by 2023 would build on this progress.

Additionally, increasing investment in both targeted and mainstreamed gender equality initiatives is needed. This investment can be measured using the internationally comparable OECD DAC “gender marker”, which measures the proportion of investments which list gender as their principal or significant objective. The W7 has recommended an internationally comparable standard for feminist international development cooperation, that by 2025 85% of ODA integrates gender equality as the principal or significant objective, with 20% going to investments where gender equality is the principal objective.³⁵ On this measure, 60% of Australia’s international development is currently spent on initiatives with gender equality as the principal or significant objective (based on the most recent and internationally comparable figures available). This places us within the top 10 OECD donors, and makes a commitment to reaching the target by 2025 an achievable aim.³⁶

Maintaining the existing 80% performance target, with a commitment to raise it to 85% in 2023, and introducing new investment targets in line with the W7 recommendations, would place Australia at the forefront of feminist international development cooperation efforts worldwide, and accelerate progress towards gender equality.

Australia ranks in the top 10 OECD donors on ODA to gender equality, but falls short of W7’s targets for feminist international development

Canada has committed to more ambitious spending targets on gender equality in line with a feminist approach to international development

Maintaining the 80% target and introducing complementary investment targets would strengthen Australia’s performance on gender equality

4

FUNDING WOMEN’S RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS

Research has shown that autonomous women’s organisations and movements are the most critical factor in changing discriminatory policy and legislation and progressing gender equality.³⁷ Women’s rights organisations also play a vital role in enabling approaches that are firmly rooted in local communities, contexts, needs and experiences,³⁸ and reaching women in marginalised communities and enabling those without power, status and rights to have a voice and to advocate for basic rights.³⁹ Engaging with local women’s organisations and networks in conflict-affected countries and ensuring that women participate in democratisation,

Autonomous women’s movements are the most significant factor in enabling legislative change towards gender equality

Women’s rights organisations receive less than 36 cents in every \$100 of ODA globally

peacebuilding and development processes is key to the success of the women, peace and security agenda.⁴⁰

Despite this, recent figures show that global funding for women's equality organisations and institutions currently sits at 0.36% of global bilateral allocable aid, or 36 cents for every \$100.⁴¹ Funding that goes directly to women's rights organising is likely to be even lower, as this measure incorporates ODA supporting machineries of government (ie: a national office for women) alongside grassroots women's organisations. The most comprehensive study of the financial state of women's rights organisations found a median annual income of just USD 20,000, and that organisations were reliant on short-term project support rather than long term flexible funding.⁴²

Australia is currently ranked seventh out of OECD donors for its funding to women's equality institutions and organisations; this represents 1.24% of our bilateral allocable ODA.⁴³ Increasing Australia's contribution to just 5% of our bilateral allocable ODA would unlock an additional \$130 million per year in funding for women's rights organisations, a critical step in moving towards a more feminist approach to international development cooperation.⁴⁴

48% of women's rights organisations have never received core funding

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendation 4: Enshrine gender equality as a core goal of Australia's international development cooperation program.

Recommendation 5: Utilise multidimensional, gender sensitive poverty measurement tools such as the Individual Deprivation Measure to inform and better target new development cooperation programs.

Recommendation 6: Commit to conducting human rights-based, intersectional gender analysis of all policies and investments within the international development cooperation program.

Recommendation 7: Maintain the existing performance target that more than 80% of investments effectively address gender equality issues in their implementation, and commit to raising the target to more than 85% by 2023.

Recommendation 8: Introduce complementary investment targets, measured against the OECD DAC gender marker, that 20% of Australia's aid budget is dedicated to investments that list gender equality as their principal objective and 65% to those that list gender equality as a significant objective (85% overall).

Recommendation 9: Unlock an additional \$130 million for women's rights organisations annually by committing 5% of Australia's development cooperation towards women's rights organisations.

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- ²² Gender and Development Network, 3.
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